

Top Russian Newspaper Editors Quit, Denouncing Pro-Kremlin Censorship

By [Anna Smolchenko for AFP](#)

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Vedomosti is one of the few remaining independent news outlets in Russia, where journalists are increasingly squeezed by curbs on press freedoms and pressure from the Kremlin. **Sergei Fadeichev / TASS**

Senior editors at Russia's leading business newspaper quit Monday in protest against what they say is censorship under new ownership, as a months-long dispute between journalists and management came to a head.

Vedomosti is one of the last major independent newspapers in Russia, where journalists are increasingly squeezed by curbs on press freedoms and pressure from the Kremlin.

Kremlin critics said the exodus of top editors likely sounded the death knell for Vedomosti in its current incarnation.

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"All five deputy editors at Vedomosti are leaving the newspaper in protest over the appointment of Andrei Shmarov as editor-in-chief," the newspaper said.

Boris Safronov, one of the editors who resigned, told AFP he believed "the old Vedomosti will soon be no more."

Launched in 1999, Vedomosti was co-founded and co-owned by Dutch entrepreneur Derk Sauer's Independent Media, the London-based Financial Times and U.S. business daily The Wall Street Journal.

Like the Financial Times, it is published on salmon-colored paper.

The paper has changed hands several times since its first print run, as lawmakers introduced legislation limiting foreign ownership of Russian media.

In March, its reporters and editors were shaken by an announcement from then-owner Demyan Kudryavtsev that he planned to sell the newspaper.

Shmarov, 65, was appointed acting editor-in-chief the same month, before the sale was finalized.

'No choice but to leave'

The newspaper was eventually sold to the head of a little-known regional news agency called FederalPress, Ivan Yeryomin.

Vedomosti journalists have denounced censorship under Shmarov, saying his appointment was political.

They complain they have been barred from covering negative opinion polls of President Vladimir Putin and that Shmarov interfered in coverage of oil giant Rosneft, which is run by Putin's top ally Igor Sechin.

In an open letter published by The Bell, an independent Russian-language news site, all five editors said they were leaving after Shmarov was confirmed as editor-in-chief.

"As acting chief editor, he ran the newsroom for almost three months and managed over that period to repeatedly violate editorial norms and guidelines adopted at Vedomosti," they said.

"We have no other choice but to leave."

The new owner has said he is certain the newspaper would retain "high professional standards."

While the daily newspaper focuses on business and industry news, its editorial section has become a vital space for dissenting voices and debate on political life in Russia.

Its journalists repeatedly complained to owners about Shmarov and recently put forward an

alternative candidate to lead the paper.

'Vedomosti RIP'

Although nearly 70 staff members backed a long-serving colleague to be editor-in-chief, the owners went ahead with the appointment of Shmarov, they said.

The outgoing editors have worked at the newspaper for around 15 years or more.

An investigation in May by several Russian news outlets, including Vedomosti, concluded that Rosneft leveraged control over the paper through debts owed by Kudryavtsev to the oil giant's bank.

Kremlin critics on Monday praised Vedomosti staff for fighting for editorial independence until the end.

"Vedomosti RIP," Yulia Galyamina, a local deputy in Moscow, said on Twitter.

Anna Kachkaeva, a media expert at the Higher School of Economics, said the departure of the top editors marked the end of the newspaper in its current form.

"Vedomosti will be published, but it will be a different newspaper," she told AFP.

"I very much hope that such a team will have the opportunity to pursue their own project."

In May, 2019 the entire politics desk of Russian business daily Kommersant, a Vedomosti rival, quit in protest over censorship.

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